ESSAY

A RE-ASSESSMENT OF SOCIETAL SECURITY: A FEW THOUGHTS ON IMMIGRATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERNATIONAL BURDEN-SHARING

Péter MARTON[1]

ABSTRACT

This essay highlights a few key considerations related to current developments in the field of immigration. It offers reflection on a recently published overview of Security Studies [Marton-Balogh-Rada: Biztonsági tanulmányok…; AJTK: Budapest, 2015], and the assessment therein of the challenges of migration, as a baseline of evaluation to be critically reviewed in light of recent events. Along with weaknesses of the present system of international burden-sharing related to refugee protection, the essay points out pros and cons as to whether a fundamental re-assessment of the situation is truly necessary, and concludes by asking some basic questions that ought to be answered before it is possible to strategically conceive of the road ahead.

[1] The author benefited from the Bolyai János Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in conducting research for this essay.

Keywords: refugees, migrants, immigration, European Union

INTRODUCTION[2]

In a recent overview and revision of the state of the art in the field of Security Studies this author has, together with co-authors István Balogh and Péter Rada, taken a critical position on the Copenhagen School's perspective on societal security.[1] Whilst the latter's definition of societal security as "the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats"[2] leaves room for different interpretations, much of the academic discourse on the subject has focused on issues of identity, and came to see the security of collective identity as the primary determinant of a society's security and immigration as a key threat to it.

Without denying the importance of identity, even as one takes account of its elusive nature and the need to avoid an essentialist perspective of what is at its core, this approach to societal security may seem naturally more valid in the context of Western European countries experiencing large-scale immigration. This does not imply that in the case of Western Europe exaggerations do not permeate the discourse as to the dangers of immigration to collective identity and the true scale of the phenomenon: to the contrary, in our book we found that the number of immigrants does not at the present justify the expectation that indigenous populations will be in the minority any time soon in the countries concerned, and that consequently it is difficult to see collective identity as truly threatened in them. The actual contrast between Central-Eastern and Western Europe is that Central-Eastern Europe has not experienced immigration to the same extent in recent history, up till very recently. We thus thought it necessary to re-interpret the notion of societal security, and the above definition, given that much else other than immigration can generate a sense of insecurity in the societal realm.

With a Central-Eastern European perspective, immigration promised to be an issue of lesser interest on our agenda. The region was, at the time of the writing of our book in 2014, clearly a source

[2] Work on this article was closed at the end of August 2015 and the article in its present state reflects developments up to this point.

rather than a target of migration, with several hundred thousand Hungarian citizens working and living abroad, mostly in European Union member countries. We have also noted a clear trend of growth in trans-migration but assessed the long-term burden generated by this for Hungarian institutions as low given that migrants are near-exclusively interested in getting into a few rich, economically strong countries such as Germany, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom, and thus do not stay in Hungary. At the same time we maintained that refugee flows are largely contained in the regions immediately neighbouring on source countries and that consequently the refugee issue may be "over-securitised" in Western European countries.

In the wake of the influx of a great number of people from Kosovo at the beginning of 2015, the continued experience of a surge in the number of migrants from other places in the wake of this wave, the rise of anti-immigration organisations, parties and popular sentiment across Europe, the decision to erect a security fence along a section of Hungary's southern border (the border with Serbia), the declaration of a state of emergency in parts of Macedonia during the summer of 2015, along with the visible breakdown of measures that were meant to stem the tide of trans-migration there – a string of these and other developments – the time seems to have come for a fundamental re-assessment of the above position on immigration. A crisis after all is a situation where extraordinary steps may be necessary; where changes in existing practices and policies may be called for.

This brief essay does not attempt to provide a comprehensive and decisive answer as to what is necessary in the present state of affairs. Inasmuch as it has a normative aim, it is to inspire a more sober, empirically informed discussion of the subject – in particular the questions of how much refugee flows continue to be contained, what share of European populations refugees and other immigrants constitute, what imminent dangers the present situation may pose, and what all of this implies from the point of view of international (including intra-EU) burden-sharing.

THE REFUGEE PIPELINE

The share of developing countries (i.e. Low or Middle Income Countries) in hosting refugees grew from 70% to 86% in the decade between 2004 and 2014.[3] Syria has become the top source in the

course of 2014, overtaking Afghanistan, and per consequence of this, countries neighbouring Syria have become the countries hosting the largest number of refugees – especially Turkey, with 1.59 million refugees, and Lebanon, with 1.15 million as of end-2014.

There was a total of 19.5 million refugees worldwide in 2014 according to UNHCR. This represented a significant increase of 14.8% over the previous year. The rise was also reflected in the number of internally displaced persons – among other conflicts, developments in Iraq and Syria account for this as well.[4]

Whilst in UNHCR's figures the top nine host countries (Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Chad, and Uganda) are clearly countries neighbouring on the source regions, as our aforementioned analysis assumed as well, one should keep in mind that these populations exist per definition in extraordinary circumstances in places where administrative capacities may be limited. To assume that exactly these numbers of people would stay in place in their locations, as registered by UNHCR or national authorities, would be in all likelihood erroneous. Even though refugee flows have been historically contained in regions in the direct vicinity of conflict zones, and this continues to be the case even today, any rise in the number of internally and externally displaced may translate into a rise in the (smaller) number of people who venture further abroad in an attempt to join more distant diaspora groups in rich countries. The population concerned may in effect be imagined as moving along a pipeline, given that transit countries are largely inconvenient destinations for the refugees.[3]

The pipeline metaphor may facilitate understanding that the burden taken by Germany (in terms of the number of people hosted) cannot be larger than the burden originally taken by countries such as Turkey. The transitory burden taken by Hungary similarly cannot be larger than the burden taken at an earlier point in time by Greece. This is true even as migrants from different sources also join the movement of people between Turkey and Europe. They enter the pipeline upstream and arrive at a point downstream later on. Peak presence downstream cannot exceed the peak upstream.

[3] This is why the idea of introducing EU-wide country quotas is bound to fail. Refugees and other migrants are interested in going to specific countries, and are unlikely to stay in a country chosen for them by bureaucratic actors.

This is relevant in that refugee migration – while it often appears in public discourse as a process fed by a limitless reservoir of migrants – does in fact have a human reserve of a measurable size. It is of course concerning that these reserves may grow in the case of continued conflict just as it is a possibility that an increasing share of the displaced population hosted by Turkey and other countries may decide in favour of moving towards Germany. Still, in terms of the number of refugees compared to GDP per capita, the largest burden for now clearly falls on comparatively poorer countries (Ethiopia, Pakistan, Chad, Uganda and Kenya are the top five hosts in the world in this respect). Per population the largest burden is taken by Lebanon and Jordan.

Germany, a country of 81 million people, with a GDP of $3.8 trillion, received only 19,200 claims from asylum-seekers in 2007. This has risen to 109,600 by 2013 and further to 173,100 in 2014. Against a backdrop of up to 800,000 asylum requests expected in Germany in 2015 in total,[5] the country has, by the month of August, received double the number of asylum seekers in 2014.[6] Projecting from these August figures, a proportionate estimate would indicate the likely arrival of over 0.5 million people by year's end. Given that there seems to be an accelerated increase in the influx of new migrants an even higher number (closer to the 800,000 figure) cannot be ruled out. At the same time, other countries, such as, for instance, Sweden, have also been receiving a growing number of applications. Sweden saw 75,100 asylum requests in 2014.

To make sense of these numbers: Just as it is reasonable to expect that Syria will never become completely deserted of people, and that all refugees will not leave neighbouring countries such as Turkey, it is sensible to expect that the majority of those who have made their way to Germany, Sweden or other EU destination countries will eventually permanently stay where they are.

The rich core of the European Union thus clearly serves as a magnet, exerting a strong pull, and the transit countries that experience the movement of migrants headed their way are in a dependent position vis-à-vis policy choices by this EU core. Should Germany or other countries decide in favour of a stricter asylum policy and/or stronger border control measures (along with a revision of the Schengen regime), the current transit countries would be facing a challenge of a new nature. This is a concern even if Germany for now seems to be moving in the opposite direction, indicating an increased readiness to host refugees from Syria.[7]

Such signals are not entirely reassuring as in the meantime Germany is still pushing for the introduction of mandatory hosting quotas and a common list of safe countries to which refugees may be deported – such a list would presumably include EU member states and among them Hungary, too.

Even with the transitory presence of migrants in their territory, countries of transit are already taking a significant burden (again, especially with measures of GDP and population in mind), and already the present level of exposure to the challenges of a protracted refugee situation has proven sufficient to evoke attempts from their part to escape some of this burden by diverting the flow of migrants towards other countries.[8] A country such as Hungary finds itself in the difficult situation of standing to be criticised either for trying to impede the movement of legitimate refugees or for inadequately protecting the borders of the Schengen Zone.

It seems on the basis of this overview that even as there is no certainty in all of the numbers (e.g. when it comes to estimates of the displaced in locales in Turkey or Lebanon), refugee flows are clearly more weakly contained than before. This has come about as gradual change – hence the accelerating tempo of the influx. Factors playing an important role in this transformation include that in the case at hand an extraordinarily large number of refugees found itself in a protracted refugee situation nearer to the rich core areas of Europe than in any other case before (with the exception of the crisis in the Balkans in the 1990s). Poor camp conditions in the countries of first asylum, which still continue to carry the (by far) greater burden as of August 2015, are also conducive to refugees' departure. As UNHCR recently indicated, its funding request for its Syria program has been met to only 33% by donors.[9] If European countries are interested in avoiding the arrival of more refugees, more could be done in this respect.

Moreover, more not only could but *should* be done, on the grounds of considerations of equity as well. The present international practice in the protection of refugees puts a disproportionate share of the burden on the countries of first asylum. For example, as recently as in January 2014 Germany was offering a mere 11,000 slots for refugee re-settlement for refugees from Syria – ironically, given that they may easily end up with as much as several dozen times that many Syrian refugees eventually. This clearly indicates the naiveté of sticking to the present

approach whereby little in re-settlement options and similarly little in funding for the countries of first asylum is formally offered by the international community. The result may be that countries that do not consider themselves overly interested in refugees may in the end find that refugees will be all the more interested in them. That those attracting most of the influx can then attempt to burden countries on the periphery of the European Union with the task of slowing down and temporarily housing refugee flows and with the prospect of quota-based repatriation schemes, citing the Dublin arrangement as a source of responsibility for these states, is no substitute for a global solution to a challenge in which even Gulf, Asian and North American countries might be expected to share.

Not all asylum seekers originate from Syria or other countries in conflict, it is important to add. Of the 340,000 who arrived in Germany so far this year only 44,000 were Syrian nationals.[10] A significant number of people came from countries far more complicated to assess with a view to entitlement to asylum, such as Pakistan, China, Nigeria, Iran,[4] or from places where clearly economic factors dominated migrants' calculations, such as Kosovo. The refugee pipeline's infrastructure is available due to other movements of people and this ought to have policy implications as well.

CONCERNING IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

Even the numbers at the present point only towards a future of slow demographic transformation where, more distantly than gut assessments have it, Europe's societies become merely more heterogeneous rather than dominated by a single immigrant ethnic group. In the United States, where popular discourse similarly reckons with the prospects of a fundamental demographic shift, and some expect the U.S. to become the largest "Latin-American" country one day, the Pew Research Center projects that Hispanics would constitute only 29% of the population by 2050;[11] it is also worth adding that the so-called "Hispanic" population is no less heterogeneous than Europe's immigrants are.

[4] Armed conflict causes displacement in both Nigeria and Pakistan. It is nevertheless questionable if the entirety of these countries' territory can be legitimately regarded as unsafe or if groups of the displaced.

Greatly differing fertility rates may seemingly logically point to a distant future in Europe where "indigenous" populations may lose their majority hold but it is worth keeping in mind that the official immigrant population in most of the Europan Union does not currently exceed 1% of society.[12] Besides immigrants there may be others of foreign origin (including illegally) in a country, of course, and the children of previous generations of immigrants may also count in the case of poorly integrated segments of immigrant communities.[5] Still, the numbers are lower than assumed. It is the currently (spectacularly) accelerating influx and the wild assumption of an endless human reserve waiting to migrate in its wake that makes people think and expect otherwise. In the meantime, Eurostat still warns, for its part, that "migration alone will almost certainly not reverse the ongoing trend of population ageing experienced in many parts of the EU."[13]

This does not mean that on the micro level of urban and rural communities or on the macro level of national domestic politics immigration cannot lead to problems. The rise of far-right political forces is one way in which indigenous populations are seeking to escape the feared consequences of continued immigration. Meanwhile, an economy offering less attractive prospects than a decade ago, pressure on state welfare services and benefits, and the ethnic balance in specific locales may aggravate intergroup tensions on the level of individual communities where a demographic shift may be much more real and visible than overall in Europe. Violent protests and even rioting may occur with increasing frequency, with the involvement of anti-immigration groups as well as settled and recently arrived immigrant communities. This is a concern for transit countries, too, where especially the coming winter times may very soon prove to be a major challenge in handling trans-migration.

IN CONCLUSION

Given that, as pointed out before, a significant part of the current flow of migrants is not strictly speaking part of the refugee pipeline as such, any solutions sought have to lie partly outside

[5] The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) thus presents higher figures for "foreign populations" from its part. See at https://data.oecd.org/migration/foreign-population.htm (accessed: 18 September 2015).

conceivable improvements to the refugee regime hinted at above. There can be no silver bullet as the variables that may affect the flow of migrants from their source countries are diverse and very different from one country to the other. They are not very easy to strategically manipulate, either. Development aid, for example, cannot realistically be expected to achieve direct results in this respect. Also, people who are determined to make the perilous journey to Europe under the presently known conditions cannot easily be hindered in this.[6]

It may be some consolation to those concerned about the impact of immigration that it is a complex system – one where changing conditions form an important input to which the system reacts as an organism. If economic prospects truly become worse at the destination, the flow of migrants eventually adjusts.

This, in fact, is the uncertain bottomline of the Great Immigration Crisis. Do refugees and migrants constitute, as unambiguously as is often voiced in public discourse, a "burden," and their arrival a "crisis," if Europe's economy and ageing societies continue to need them? Or does the challenge lie rather in managing the influx so that some of the actually negative consequences can be partly or wholly avoided?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[1] Marton Péter – Balogh István – Rada Péter, Biztonsági tanulmányok: Új fogalmi keretek, és tanulságok a visegrádi országok számára (AJTK: Budapest, 2015).

[2] Buzan, Barry – Wæver, Ole – Kelstrup, Morten – Lemaitre, Pierre, eds., *Identity, migration and the new security agenda in Europe*, (Pinter: London), 23.o.

[3] „Facts and figures about refugees," *UNHCR*, accessed: 28 August 2015, at http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html.

[4] „UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014," *UNHCR*, accessed: 29 August 2015, at http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html.

[5] „Migrants crisis: Merkel vows 'no tolerance' of migrant hatred," *BBC*, 26 August 2015, at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34061532.

[6] Security fences may have some effect in diverting migrants towards softer borders as long as such exist. They are not impossible to penetrate, however, and their actually useful effect may lie more in channeling migrants towards controlled entry points – a positive result in terms of the Schengen Zone's (or any country's) border and homeland security, to the extent that it works.

[6] Kate Connolly, „Germany to receive 750,000 asylum seekers this year, reports claim," *The Guardian*, 18 August 2015, at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/18/germany-asylum-seekers-huge-increase-predicted-government-sources.

[7] Cassie Werber, „Germany is the first European country to free Syrian refugees from a draconian bureaucratic "trap"," *Quartz*, 26 August 2015.

[8] Marcus Tanner, „Europe's Dilemma Over Migrants Can Only Get Worse," *Balkan Insight*, 21 August 2015, at http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/europe-s-dilemma-over-migrants-can-only-get-worse-08-21-2015-1.

[9] „Greater support in countries of first asylum needed to stem refugee outflows," *UNHCR*, 26 August 2015, at http://www.unhcr.org/55ddd2c86.html.

[10] Marcus Tanner, *op. cit.*

[11] Michael Shafter, „Oscar Guardiola-Rivera's "What If Latin America Ruled the World," review article, *The Washington Post*, 5 November 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/05/AR2010110503427.html.

[12] „Immigrants per 1000 inhabitants – 2013," *Eurostat*, accessed: 28 August 2015, at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Immigrants,_2013_%28%C2%B9%29_%28per_1_000_inhabitants%29_YB15.png.

[13] „Migration and migrant population statistics," *Eurostat*, accessed: 28 August 2015, at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics.